

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Health and Hospitals
On the DMHAS Budget
H.B. 6365, the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget**

**By Malin Olofsson, Wi-mentor Program Coordinator, United Way of Coastal Fairfield County on behalf
of The Governor's Prevention Partnership to Protect Connecticut's Workforce
DBA The Governor's Prevention Partnership
February 20, 2009**

Good Afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Harris, Representative Ryan and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Malin Olofsson, I am the Wi-mentor program coordinator run by United Way Coastal Fairfield County.

In January 2008 United Way of Coastal Fairfield County launched the Wi-mentor program in collaboration with the Bridgeport Public Schools, School Volunteer Association, Bridgeport Public Education Fund, the Board of Education and Pitney Bowes. All parties involved had identified the need for more mentoring opportunities for Bridgeport youth.

Wi-mentor is an internet-based mentoring program with a built in curriculum that explores college, careers, academics and life skills. Through this program we are able to reach adults whom in the past have hesitated to become mentors due to time commitment. Hundreds of more students now have the opportunity to connect with caring adults, who share their life experiences, listen and support and explore colleges and careers. Hundreds of students are and will be improving their technological skills, interpersonal skills and writing skills. Students learn such things as the importance of a firm handshake and proper attire for an interview, of the opportunities available to encourage them to do well in high school so that they can go on to college and lead a healthy and decent life.

Through its continued guidance and support The Governor's Prevention Partnership helps us reach youth in Bridgeport. By providing mentoring program quality standards the Partnership has guided Wi-mentor to operate at its full potential. I am confident in my decision-making, knowing that the choices I make will benefit my mentors and mentees. Program participants enjoy a positive, fun and often times life changing experience, because the level of quality needed to run a successful and effective mentoring program has been identified.

One of my students was off to a bad start. His attendance was poor and participation even worse. However, his mentor stood by him, using different strategies to reach out to him. After trying for months without a change in participation, we decided to end the mentor-mentee relationship. I insisted that the boy should meet his mentor in person to end the relationship on a good note. After meeting his mentor in person the student begged me to let him stay with his mentor. Since then the student's grades, attitude and attendance in school have improved. This student went from emailing his mentor

sporadic, one sentence long emails, to emailing on his own time, outside of assigned class time, updating his mentor on his life and future dreams.

One girl expressed the thrill of having an adult that listens to her, whom she can turn to if she is upset or needs advice and will not get judged. She also explained that she has no one in her family to turn to for college guidance. Her mentor can and her mentor does.

I urge the Appropriations Committee to continue to support prevention programs. We cannot ask our youth to find all the answers on their own. We need to work together by offering programs that help ready youth to lead a healthy life.

Thank you.